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ABSTRACT

This monograph discusses the specific components that might be used to improve the college-going rate of low-income urban youth when they participate in "college preparation programs" that supplement or complement what takes place in school. Many people have ideas about helping youth, but not all approaches are equally successful. College preparation programs cannot be blamed for continuing disparities in educational achievement nor viewed as a cure-all for educational inequity. This monograph considers the program components that are most likely to improve educational achievement for underrepresented students and discusses nine key components: (1) a rigorous academic curriculum; (2) academic, college, and career counseling; (3) cocurricular activities; (4) incorporation of students' cultures; (5) family and community engagement; (6) peer support; (7) mentoring; (8) timing of interventions; and (9) funding priorities. (SLD)

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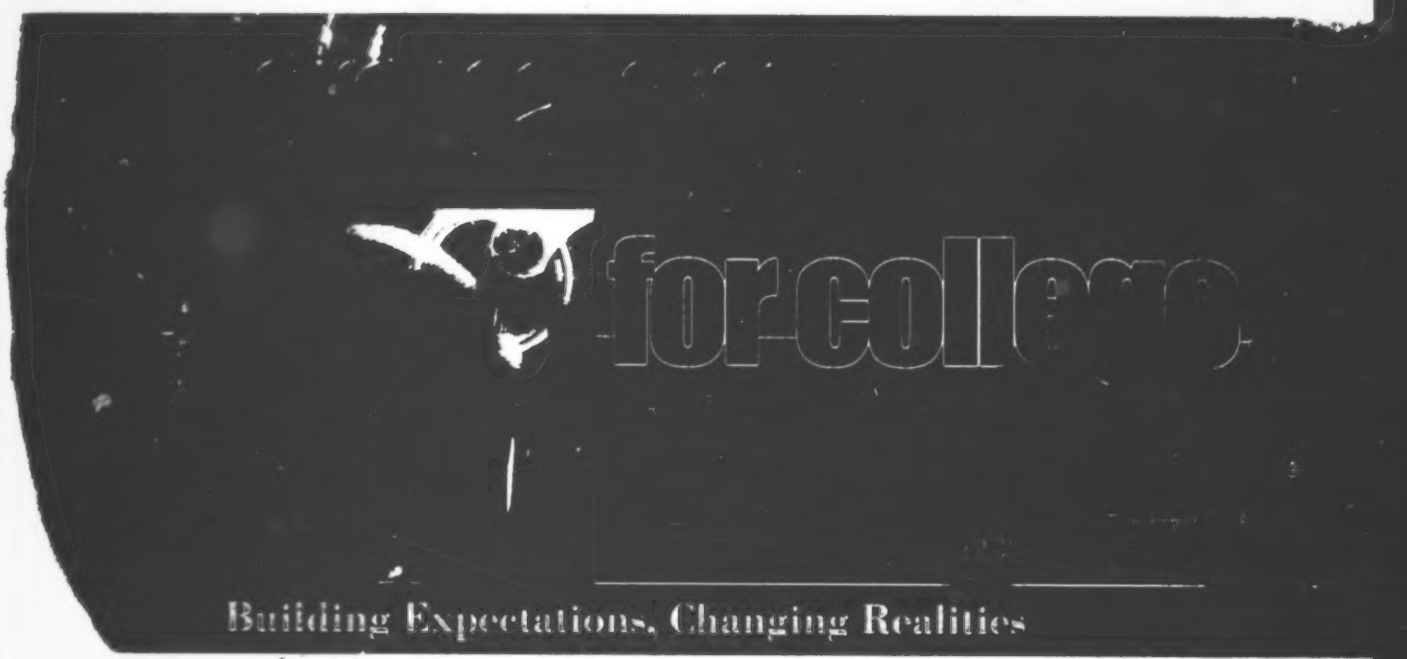

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One of us was pregnant during the writing of this monograph.

We dedicate this to Teva Rose Corwin.

May she grow up in an equitable and just world.

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preparing

Building Expectations, Changing Realities

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a message from the director

Throughout the 20th century access to a postsecondary education was seen as a primary route out of poverty. Although policies, approaches, and programs varied over time, the transition from high school to college was a major hurdle for first-generation, low-income, urban youth. Adolescents and their families frequently had little idea about what college entailed, and their preparation for doing college work often suffered in under-funded and inadequate schools. Unfortunately, similar problems still confront us in the 21st century.

In this monograph we discuss the specific components that might be employed to improve college-going rates of low-income urban youth when they participate in "college preparation programs." These are programs that supplement and/or complement what takes place in school. They range from programs that begin as early as the seventh grade to programs that do not begin until the senior year in high school. They might be programs that focus exclusively on increasing academic skills or programs that are social in nature and provide adolescents with recreational activities during the summer months. Some involve families, counselors, mentors, and peers in their activities and others do not. On the optimistic side, there seem to be as many people with ideas for helping youth as there are youth in need of support. On the more troubling side, however, not all approaches are equally successful.

Outreach programs have begun to come under increased scrutiny. Current programs are expected to meet higher levels of accountability from foundations and granting agencies. And yet, there still is no consensus on what makes a program successful. Numerous programs have been created, revised, dissolved and recreated, but programmatic success still remains a mystery. According to many researchers, little empirical evidence has been collected about program effectiveness.

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College preparation programs neither can be blamed for the continuing disparities in educational achievement nor viewed as a cure-all for educational inequity. Structural inequity creates unequal opportunities, and the quality of one's schooling varies dramatically based on social class and race. Nevertheless, the remarkable diversity in college preparation programs raises a question that is the driving force in this monograph: With a finite amount of time and resources, which programmatic components are most likely to improve educational achievement for underrepresented youth in the United States?

In the pages that follow are evaluations of nine key components of college preparation programs. In each section we have attempted to provide the core debates, definitions, and suggestions for improving each component. We do not intend to suggest that for a program to be successful, it needs to include and develop each component. Instead, we advocate adapting program design to the unique needs of the populations served. We begin with some background about the nine components and then proceed to a discussion of each one.

William G. Tierney

table of contents

Overview 1

Academic Preparation:
The Key to College Enrollment 2

Guiding Advice:
Quality Counseling Enhances College-Going 4

Outside the Curriculum:
Do Co-Curricular Activities Influence College-Going? 6

Cultural Wealth:
Tapping Into Local Identities 8

Family Matters:
Families Influence College-Going 10

Friends in School:
Peer Groups Influence College-Going 12

The Tasks of Mentoring:
A Critical Component for College-Going 14

When to Begin:
The Earlier the Better 16

Weighing the Costs:
Evaluating Quality, Determining Priorities 18

Conclusion 20

About CHEPA 21

Acknowledgements 21

overview

College preparation programs enhance and supplement a school's regular activities to assist primarily low-income, minority youth who might otherwise not be able to attend college. While individual programs vary in significant ways, there are several commonalities across programs.

Based on more than a decade of qualitative research examining geographically and programmatically diverse college preparation programs, the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis (CHEPA) developed nine hypotheses pertaining to central aspects of college preparation programs. We then commissioned a panel of well-respected scholars in the field of college access to conduct extensive literature reviews on the nine topics. Our primary goal was to find what the research literature said about the influence the following factors have on college preparation and enrollment:

1. A rigorous academic curriculum
2. Academic, college, and career counseling
3. Co-curricular activities
4. Incorporation of students' cultures
5. Family and community engagement
6. Peer support
7. Mentoring
8. Timing of interventions
9. Funding priorities

Throughout the undertaking our assumption has been that research on topics such as these can be useful guideposts for practitioners and policymakers, but they ought not be thought of as findings such as one might discover in a laboratory. That is, schools and classrooms are not unchanging black boxes where one can manipulate one variable to produce a desired result. In dynamic environments in which multiple inputs change from year to year, one ought not expect to make causal predictions. Nevertheless, a great deal of research provides clear indications about significant components of college preparation programs.

As might be expected, while some areas are well researched and conclusive, other areas are open to doubt. In the acknowledgements we list the authors who conducted the research that serves as the backbone of this monograph. We will publish a book with SUNY Press in late 2003 that fleshes out the findings.

The Key to College Enrollment

Academic preparation is the central component of college-going. Virtually all researchers agree that without a rigorous curriculum—especially including a focus on math and language skills—students will not be prepared for college.

Why Strong Academic Preparation is Important:

- Groups of students who continue to be underrepresented in higher education are also less likely to be prepared for college.
- College enrollment rates and persistence to graduation are higher among students who participate in college prep compared to students enrolled in a vocational program.
- Preparation via academic curriculum is particularly important to the college enrollment decisions of low-income students.
- Students enrolled in affluent school communities are more likely to participate in a rigorous curricular program.
- Students from economically disadvantaged families are more likely to be enrolled in non-academic curricular tracks or academic tracks that are not rigorous.

What is "Academic Preparation?"

"Preparation" generally refers to completing a substantial number of rigorous courses during the high school years. For example, high school students should complete at least algebra II, and they should have experience in science courses with laboratory requirements. Academic preparation, however, is not limited to enrollment in classes. Rather, it points to the development of skill levels that will prepare students for college level work.

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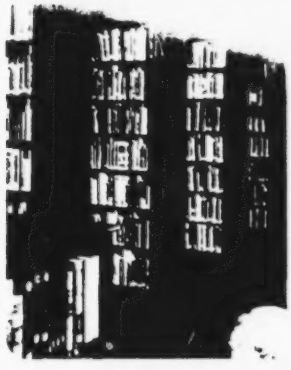
Strategies for Supporting and Strengthening Academics in College Preparation Programs:

1. Begin efforts to improve academic preparation before high school: Long-term attention to academics is key. Begin as early as possible, no later than middle school. With an early start, programs can improve academic preparation and raise educational expectations.
2. Ensure that students have opportunities to enroll in rigorous coursework: College preparation programs can have an impact on students' predisposition for rigorous coursework. Encourage students to seek enrollment in challenging courses, including honors and advanced mathematics when they are available. Emphasize the development of skill sets and academic rigor rather than just enrollment in "Advanced Placement." Create individual academic plans for students so that they look ahead to specific courses and goals.
3. Offer additional academic support: Provide tutoring, test preparation, note-taking and study skills assistance, and academic counseling.
4. Coordinate with K-12 and college educators: Share expertise and resources with other educators; collaboration promotes awareness at all levels.

Fast Facts on Academics

- Of first-generation students enrolled in four-year schools: 64% completed advanced math; 11% completed only algebra I or geometry.
- 83% of students who complete algebra by 8th grade go on to complete advanced math in high school.
- 71% of students who enroll in a rigorous academic curriculum in high school persist to complete a bachelor's degree (including first-generation students).

We concur with the U.S. Department of Education's definition of rigorous as "including at least 4 years of English and mathematics (including precalculus), 3 years each of science (including biology, chemistry, and physics) and social studies, 3 years of foreign language, and one honors/AP course or AP test score" (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, "The Condition of Education 2002").



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advice:

Quality Counseling Enhances College-Going

Although college bound students undoubtedly are able to receive counseling from numerous individuals, our focus here is on the school counselor. Tragically, school counseling services have been decimated by budget cuts. In many low-income urban schools the counselor-to-student ratio exceeds 1 to 1,000. Often times, the few counselors who are available are consumed by other activities, and college counseling falls by the wayside. Yet counselors can significantly help students and families understand the college application process. Counselors also often provide socio-emotional support for the many challenges that adolescents face. The need for quality counseling services is particularly pronounced for students of color, low-income students, rural students, women, and first-generation, college-bound students who face unique challenges when applying to and enrolling in college.

Fast Facts on Counseling

- Recommended maximum counselor-to-student ratio: 1:250
- National average counselor-to-student ratio: 1:513
- Average counselor-to-student ratio in large urban cities: 1:740
- Average counselor-to-student ratio in California and Minnesota: 1: 1,000
  (American Counselor Association, American School Counselor Association)

College preparation programs often attempt to address shortcomings in guidance by incorporating a counseling component into their program design. If counseling services are not a central focus, how might programs make best use of the limited guidance they provide to students?

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Counseling Activities

- *Disseminate information about college requirements, application processes, and important deadlines.*
- *Make sure students are enrolled in college-appropriate coursework.*
- *Foster college-going aspirations.*
- *Draw connections between academic progress and career choices.*
- *Assist parents in understanding their role in fostering college aspirations and aiding students with the application process.*

Strategies for Improving Counseling Services:

1. Begin early and foster long-term relationships: Implement comprehensive college counseling in elementary and middle schools.
2. Make counseling a priority in programmatic design: Include help on test-taking, essay writing, and interviewing.
3. Decrease counselor-to-student ratios: Smaller ratios allow more meaningful interactions.
4. Acknowledge students' diverse needs: Be aware of how students' and their parents' different racial and socioeconomic statuses (SES) affect their ability to access the school's college choice resources.
5. Stay current: Guide students through the application process with up-to-date counseling resources to address the constantly changing college admissions, costs, and financial aid information.
6. Improve counselor training and professional development: Emphasize improving college knowledge.
7. Acknowledge the role of teachers in the counseling process: Encourage students to talk with teachers about their college plans.
8. Partner with colleges: Maintain professional relations with college admissions officers.
9. Engage families: Provide guidance and support to families in accessible and appropriate language.

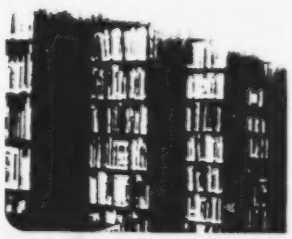
Web Resources

www.collegeboard.com
Offers info on selecting and applying to the right college; also provides financial aid information.

nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cool
Provides a search engine for more than 7,000 schools; students can search by program, location, size, and more.

www.embark.com
Works in partnership with *The Princeton Review*; provides info to plan, prepare, and apply to colleges. Also includes a link for SAT registration.

Still Research



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outs: the curricu

Do Co-Curricular Activities Influence College-Going?

Sure, grades, test scores, and high school curricula matter. But simply focusing on academic coursework does not guarantee entry to college. Programs are aided when they take into account how to create a rich array of co-curricular activities that complement academic curricula and keep students coming back for more.

> ***Co-Curriculum*** *refers to school- and community-based activities that take place outside the structure and timing of the regular classroom and school day.*

College preparation programs can provide opportunities for students to engage in co-curricular activities. Social activities offered in college preparation can be formal or informal.

formal activities:

- election to a college-prep leadership office
- participation in summer workshops that are social in nature
- retreats to discuss college-going plans
- a trip to visit colleges
- participation in graduation ceremonies from the program
- enrollment in college classes
- participation in service learning activities

informal activities:

- before and after school activities
- weekend social events
- group trips to cultural events
- "hanging out" with friends in the same college prep program

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Strategies for Enhancing Co-Curricular Activities:

1. Offer a wide range of academic and non-academic activities: Programs can include field trips, personal development seminars, social skills workshops, college fairs, test preparation, graduation ceremonies, and celebrations.
2. Minimize obstacles to participation: When planning activities, consider costs, access to transportation, and parental support/permission.
3. Solicit student input on worthwhile extra-curricular activities: Program participants can offer advice about activities that keep them interested and engaged.
4. Incorporate cultural values and themes into extra-curricular events: For example, programs can arrange holiday celebrations with family and/or communities.
5. Ensure that all students have access to school-sponsored activities. If activities are beneficial, all students should be encouraged to participate.
6. Partner with civic groups and elected officials: Community members and local officials can provide important opportunities for engagement in the local environment. They also can provide internships and service learning opportunities.

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wealth:

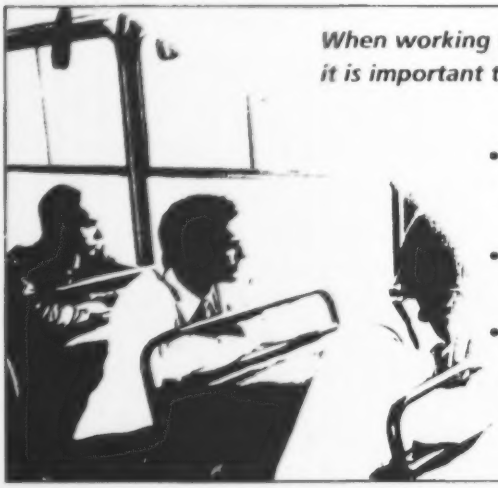
Tapping into Local Identities

An emphasis on culture in college preparation programs can influence how student learning is organized, how curriculum develops, and how teaching methods are implemented. Given your local population, how do you develop an asset-based approach that addresses family and community needs?

College-going skills and knowledge are most effectively communicated by programs that incorporate students' diverse backgrounds into academic and social activities. Culturally sensitive programs create safe spaces that encourage student aspirations and reinforce their college-going identities.

> ***Defining Culture in College Prep:***
> *How to define "culture" has been a source of widespread debate by anthropologists and their colleagues for more than a century. Our purpose here is not to presume to settle a useful argument that likely will continue to unfold over the foreseeable future.*

For our purposes we define culture as the racial and ethnic identity of the students and their families. The research is less conclusive on the best way to incorporate a student's identity into a college preparation program. However, the research is quite clear that working from a deficit model is harmful to the welfare of the child. Families from varying backgrounds possess a great deal of cultural wealth that can best be harnessed as a support for students rather than viewed as a deficit. Examples of cultural wealth might include bilingualism, biculturalism, and strong social or religious values.



When working from a cultural wealth perspective, it is important to remember:

- Student and community cultures are sources of strength, not deficits to be overcome.
- Students, parents, and communities of color value educational achievement.
- Cultural activities and values found in the home and community can be adapted for use in programs.

Strategies for Bringing Student Cultures into College Preparation:

1. Engage the family and community in college preparation: Rather than a value gap, consider that families and communities of diverse backgrounds are able to work against information gaps. Parents and families can be included as members of a planning board. Communicating in the home language also can encourage family participation.
2. Utilize peer groups: Peer groups can affirm students' ethnic/cultural backgrounds and academic identities. Connect to college students from the community to reinforce postsecondary opportunities.
3. Use cultural resources: For example, bring in members of the local community, including businesses, community leaders, and mentors.
4. Bring culture into programs formally: Offer workshops and courses on cultural history. Introduce culturally relevant materials into curriculum and program delivery, and help students be reflective about their community and cultures.

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matters

Families Influence College-Going

Parent involvement at home and at school has been associated with higher rates of student achievement, attendance, homework completion, graduation, and college enrollment. The research points out that parent engagement is critical for college preparation during secondary school, especially for low-income families who are more likely to be disadvantaged by tracking structures and inadequate schools. Family support extends beyond parents and includes older siblings and extended families. Programs should remain receptive to the needs of local audiences.

The challenge of involving parents is twofold. Programs rarely have staff members dedicated to parent outreach, and parents often have limited time and college knowledge. Despite these obstacles, enlisting parents as allies and integrating family education and support strengthens a program's overall impact on students.

Why involve families?

- Engagement with families is a way of affirming students' cultures and building a more holistic college-going culture that pervades students' lives.
- Family members can provide relief and additional support to often over-worked program staff (mentoring, supervision, guidance).
- Families are best tapped into as allies in the college preparation process rather than as passive bystanders or potential obstacles.
- Investment in parents as resources for college-going can have educational ripple effects throughout marginalized communities.

Strategies for Engaging Families:
Engaging Families Involves a Process of Building Trust, Recognizing Similar Goals, and Developing Relationships.

1. Start early to bridge the information gap: Provide personalized and linguistically appropriate information focusing on steps in the pathway to college and how parents can help, beginning in elementary school.
2. Encourage networking: Facilitate the expansion of family social networks related to college options to include more educators, college students/alumni, and families like themselves.
3. Empower parents as advocates: Reinforce parents' sense of self-efficacy through workshops on adolescent development or advocacy training by community organizers. Bring parents to college campuses so that they can become familiar with the environment.

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in school:

Peer Groups Influence College-Going

Few topics about the processes of education have been studied as often as peer groups. Peers are blamed for dropout behavior and lauded for offering good role modeling. They are not often studied as actors in the college-going process, so the research is less certain about what strategies are certain to work in helping students go to college.

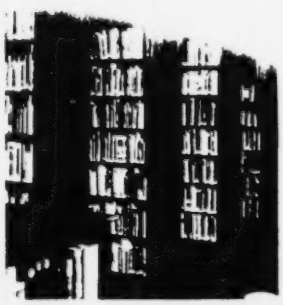
Nevertheless, peer groups abound. In class and outside of class, students surround themselves with their peers. More often than not, peer groups come together by happenstance rather than forethought. Including peer groups in the college-going process can make a difference.

- High school peer group influences are tied to students' age; peers influence one another differently in elementary school than in high school.
- Peer groups play a crucial role in identity development and building college aspirations for minority youth.
- High school students are often involved in multiple peer groups related to different activities and interests—team sports, school leadership, musical groups, groups interested in the arts, clubs, community groups and religious communities. These peer groups may or may not overlap in membership.

Peer Facts

Strategies for Bringing Peers into the College Preparation Process:

1. Cultivate the peer groups that might be "produced" by college preparation programs: Peer interactions in college preparation can be important in affecting students' educational aspirations.
2. Use peer groups as a resource to be developed: Instead of thinking about peers as problems, work toward enhancing their potential. Create small learning groups that are maintained over a long period of time.
3. Develop a sense of teamwork within the peer group: For example, peers can work in cooperative study groups. Group processes not only have the ability to increase student learning, but students also learn a valuable study skill for when they enter college.
4. Incorporate the socio-cultural aspects of peer groups: Peer groups have different effects for different groups; acknowledge these differences and consider how to involve specific groups in positive learning experiences.
5. Provide space and a place for peer interaction: Create a venue in which college-going values can develop and students can engage with one another.



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Basics of Mentoring:

A Critical Component for College-Going

Mentoring has gained widespread popularity as a strategy for increasing academic success. However, the reality of "mentoring" is much more complex; mentoring is not simply "hanging out" or being a role model for youth. Age differences and power dynamics are a significant aspect of the relationship; mentors and protégés may have very different ideas about the role of the mentor. The structure of mentoring programs varies widely. Programs can offer formal or informal mentoring; one-on-one programs with relationships maintained over a long period of time show significantly positive outcomes.

Although the research frequently lauds mentoring as a successful strategy, how mentoring gets defined varies from program to program and research project to research project. "Who" provides mentoring is also a complicated question: While research suggests that individual guidance is a critical component for intervention, we do not know if having a specific "mentor" in a program is critical. Oftentimes, counselors, teachers, program directors, and family members act as important sources of guidance. Programs that offer specific mentors and mentoring activities are often prohibitively expensive to maintain.

Defining Mentors:

Purposes of mentoring:

- to provide general guidance for college and career
- to offer additional support to marginalized youth by affirming self worth and cultural norms
- to encourage college-going aspirations
- to affect behavioral outcomes such as truancy, drug use, and fighting
- to improve grades and test scores (usually in the context of a comprehensive program)

Types of formal mentoring programs:

- peer-based
- school staff and faculty-based
- community volunteers
- corporate/professional volunteers
- one-on-one programs
- one mentor working with a small group of protégés

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Strategies for Developing a Mentoring Program in College Preparation:

1. Specify the role of the mentor and clarify mentoring goals: For example, mentors may be engaged to work with students on specific tasks, or more generally as role models. Provide mentor training for specific program goals.
2. Develop and support long-term mentor relationships: As students grow, they have different needs; an established and trusted relationship provides consistent support. Develop one-on-one individualized plans.
3. Understand the cultural considerations that must be taken into account in mentoring programs: For example, mentor relationships may be most effective when students are paired with mentors of the same race, gender, or ethnicity.
4. Evaluate mentors and mentoring programs so that their potential can be better understood: Stick with what works for a particular population.
5. Look to the community: Business leaders, community groups, teachers, and college students can provide valuable formal and informal mentorship. Use neighborhood resources to diversify and expand the population of mentors.

Fast Facts on Mentoring

- The average mentor program serves 291 students
- The average mentor-to-student ratio is 1:25
- Students receive less than 5 hours of mentoring contact per month
- The average cost for a program is $1100 per student per year, excluding the volunteer time for the mentor and in-kind contributions, materials, and equipment
- Including the mentor's time, the average cost is $2300 annually

About Mentoring

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When to begin:

The Earlier the Better

The research increasingly points out that waiting until the senior year in high school is too late to begin preparing for college. The college application process follows years of academic preparation and involves meeting a series of formal deadlines. Students start forming college-going aspirations at an early age thanks in part to the encouragement of families, teachers, and peers. First-generation students and their families often need additional guidance about appropriate course choices, college choices, and application deadlines.

The timing of interventions has significant implications for the content of preparation programs and nature of support during different phases in a student's educational career. Understanding the formal and informal aspects of college choice enhances the ability of program staff and families to better support students.

Formal influences on the timing of interventions:

- Middle school and high school curricula (required courses and grades)
- College-related guidance that provides specific information about the college admissions process, cultivates student interest in college, and improves student preparation for postsecondary participation
- Required standardized tests and entrance exams
- College application deadlines

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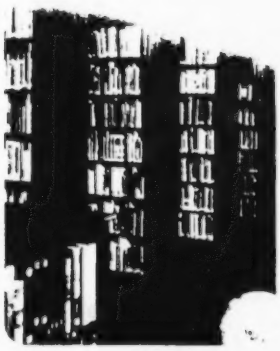
Informal Influences on the Timing of Interventions:

- Informational networks (family, peers, mentors, teachers, and staff) that help students gain understanding about college options, steps in the college admissions process, and college costs

- Support networks (family, peers, mentors, teachers, and staff) that influence perceptions about postsecondary education and aspirations to attend college

Strategies for Scheduling Interventions:

1. Engage students in rigorous academic preparation and college guidance no later than middle school: Seek information about appropriate college preparation by specfic grade level.
2. Provide students with ongoing information about college and the admissions process: This can be approached with individualized academic planners, application workshops, and career guidance. Engage communities in support of these efforts.
3. Foster college-going aspirations beginning in elementary grades: Invite alumni and professional speakers to talk about pathways to college, or provide one-on-one mentoring.
4. Help students prepare for college entrance exams: Offer workshops and provide fee waivers.
5. Supply students and families with information about how to afford college: Organize workshops, provide drop-in programs and publications, and provide concrete suggestions and timelines.



About The Timing of Interventions

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24 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Weighing the costs

Evaluating Quality, Determining Priorities

Evaluating the costs and benefits of program delivery is complex, and research is spare on the topic. On one level, analysis involves the slippery task of weighing fiscal versus social costs and benefits of programs. On another, it is tricky to tie the effectiveness of programs to specific program components. Yet, this type of analysis is helpful in guiding program design and funding priorities.

Steps to Guide Cost-Benefit Analysis

Determine the costs of the program

- What is the total cost of the program, including in-kind donations?
- What is the cost per student?
- What are the program components, and what does each cost?

Consider the program's benefits

- How does the program track outcomes?
- How are benefits measured?
- Does the program produce the impact it was designed to produce?
- What are the intangible benefits of the program? What are the tangible benefits?
- Does the benefit of the program outweigh program costs?
- Does the program offer the most cost-effective and appropriate way of reaching the desired goals?
- Does the program have an infrastructure to support an evaluation process?

continued on following page

Pay attention to the following aspects of determining costs:

a. Quality of information: How thorough are the data you are using in your analysis?

b. Short vs. long-term impact: Do you know what happens to students well after the intervention is complete?

c. Tangibles vs. intangibles: How do you compare the impact or costs of seemingly intangible items (i.e. "cost" of volunteers, or societal benefit of an intervention) to simply counting who completes, graduates, or scores well?

d. Micro vs. macroeconomics: Are you interested in immediate program effectiveness and benefits, or long-term impact on program participants and society?

e. Impact: Is there a ripple effect so that the impact of the program is larger than simply the program itself?

f. In-kind contribution: Does the program take advantage of in-kind contributions and community resources? What relationships might be beneficial for the program?

g. Evaluate continuously: Create a feedback loop that relies on consistent program evaluation. When evaluation is an integral part of program maintenance, programs can operate more effectively.

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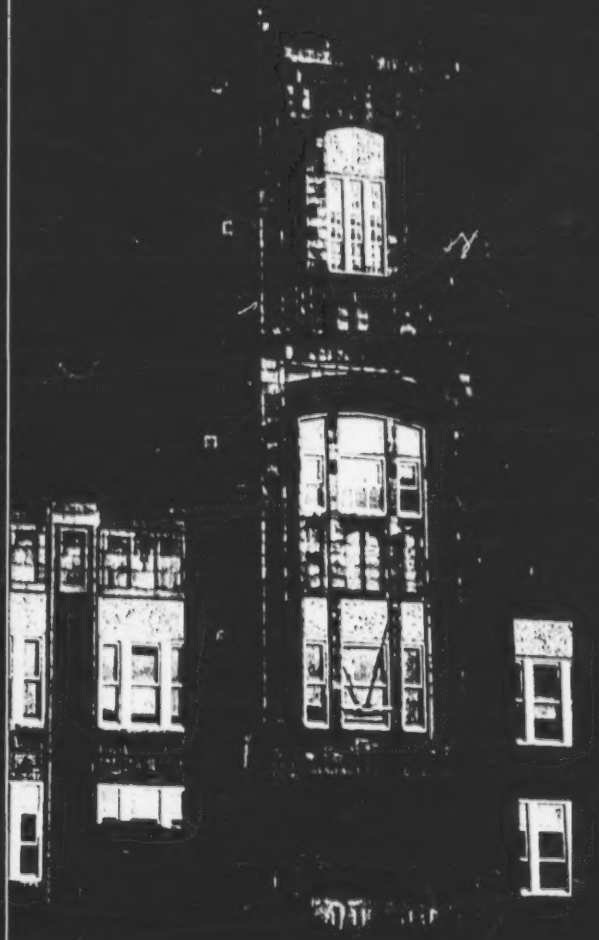
conclusion

Our goal in this monograph has been to unpack the complex question of "what works" in college preparation. Of necessity, we have narrowed our focus to instrumental activities and have left out a number of elements. we have not addressed the important questions of financial aid for college, differences in experience by gender, and retention in postsecondary environments. The nine components of college preparation addressed here intersect and interact; we present them here as discreet units, but we also know that they complement one another.

These pages do not suggest that in order for college preparation to be successful, all nine components must be present in every program. College preparation is not a lock-step process whereby "success" is accomplished with the completion of steps one through nine. Rather, the unique requirements of particular programs and clients should determine how these suggestions might be used. We intend this text as a roadmap of the kinds of activities that appear to have the best chance of improving access to college for the students they serve.

We also offer these components with the hope that expectations can be raised and realities can be changed. Opportunity, access, and attainment for minority, low-income and first generation students continues to fall below the levels afforded majority students. Given this fundamental challenge and the highly charged political context of our times, college preparation programs ought to be examined so that ways to promote success can be identified and enhanced to produce a more equitable and just world.



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about chepa

The Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis is an interdisciplinary research center based at the University of Southern California. Our mission is to improve urban higher education, strengthen school-university relationships, and focus on international higher education, emphasizing Latin America and the Pacific Rim. Our projects focus exclusively on policy oriented studies pertaining to the improvement of postsecondary education. In addition to the work that has been outlined here, we are currently involved in studies pertaining to shared governance in higher education, increasing the diversity of the faculty, and a research-based project that will provide ways to improve the transfer rates of urban community college students to four-year universities. In June 2001, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne to enhance our capability in conducting comparative higher education research. Over the past decade, we have received funding from, among others, the Ford Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, Atlantic Philanthropies, the James Irvine Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the J. Paul Getty Trust, and the Haynes Foundation.

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